

THE HIGH COST OF SERVING IN THE ARMY RESERVE

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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Since 9/11 the Army Reserve has been challenged to transform from a strategic force to an operational force that is constantly deploying some portion of its units and individuals. Reservists are no longer known as the weekend warriors who serve actively two weeks in the summer. Over time, the frequency of Reserve deployments and the time between deployments, or dwell time, has become a point of deep concern both in and outside the military. It will be difficult for Citizen Soldiers to maintain their operational effectiveness throughout their entire Army Reserve career. Citizen Soldiers have competing priorities; their jobs, families, and civilian goals are also important. Civilian careers and local roots distinguish Citizen- Soldiers from their active-duty counterparts. The Army Reserve is a valuable contributor to the nation's security. As a part-time force, it is important that its use in war and peacetime be coordinated to avoid overuse in order to preserve its excellence. This paper will explain why an operational reserve force is needed and the impacts of an operational reserve on the Citizen Soldier. It concludes with recommendations for policies that will provide a foundation for management of the Army Reserve as an operational force.

THE HIGH COST OF SERVING IN THE ARMY RESERVE

The nation continues to call and the Reserve components continue to answer that call. But in answering that call, we cannot lose sight of the need to balance their commitment to country with their commitment to family and civilian employers. That is why our efforts to: relieve stress on the force is absolutely essential; continue to rebalance the force is so crucial; and ensure that utilization not turn into over-utilization is so critical.¹

Thomas F. Hall, Assistant Secretary of the
Defense for Reserve Affairs 2006

Nine years of war has brought about an unprecedented shift in the use of the Army Reserve. The traditional role of the Army Reserve, to augment the active forces during a major contingency, is long gone. Approximately 550,000 Reserve Component (RC) Soldiers, consisting of the U.S. Army Reserve and the Army National Guard, were mobilized for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.² This paper will emphasize the U.S. Army Reserve, referred to as either the Army Reserve or the Reserve, but many of the findings apply to other reserve components, most notably the Army National Guard. The shift to a larger and more consistent operational role has created challenges for the Army Reserve that need addressing if the Army Reserve is expected to operate at its full potential. Transitioning to an operational reserve, where its soldiers will repeatedly be called to support contingencies and missions at home will be a difficult process to manage and sustain without having necessary policies and procedures in place.

The Soldiers of the Army Reserve mobilize, demobilize, reset, train and then do it all over again based on the cyclic Army Force Generation Model (ARFORGEN). This model was designed to provide a predictable training and deployment schedule. It provides predictability for units, but not for individual Soldiers. Soldiers are still being

cross-leveled into units to fill personnel shortages, primarily due to the shortages of mid-level non-commissioned officers and company grade officers.

Work remains to improve the model's application, but many changes have been implemented to improve how reservists are managed and to ease some of the stress caused by frequent mobilization. The Army Reserve is a valuable asset to the total force and policies need to be examined to ensure that reservists are not overly stressed. The U.S. military cannot continue to do all that it does without relying on the RC. In this research paper I will examine what defines the reserve and why an operational reserve is needed, identify the impacts an operational reserve has on Reserve Soldiers, and recommend policies that will enable the Army Reserve to shape its force to be sufficiently agile and flexible to operate as part of an operational force.

Background

Use of the Army Reserve in support of contingencies has increased significantly since 9/11. Terrorist attacks on the homeland created a new era in which the United States' need for an operational RC force has increased dramatically. The number of Army Reserve members mobilized has declined since May 2008; however, the numbers remain much higher than in past decades. This has caused concern among Department of Defense (DOD) leadership, Soldiers, and employers about whether such high rates of use can be sustained by part-time Soldiers.

Prior to January 2007, DOD policy authorized involuntary call-ups of Reservists for cumulative periods of up to 24 months. The Army policy for standard tour lengths authorized call-ups of RC units for 16-18 months. However these lengthy deployments

created hardships for Army Reserve soldiers and their families and employers; their frequency and unpredictability made the rate of deployments unsustainable.

Accordingly, Army leaders have been questioning the Army's ability to field enough forces to meet all of its world-wide commitments.³ Then Chief of Staff of the Army, General Schoomaker, testified before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, "At this pace, without recurrent access to the RCs, through remobilization, we will break the active component".⁴ After assuming office in January 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates abandoned the 24-month mobilization policy.

Secretary Gates signed a memorandum entitled "Utilization of the Total Force." His new policies institutionalized judicious use of the RC by limiting involuntary mobilization to 12 months. It solidified the policy goals of one year of mobilization, followed by at least five years of demobilization (corresponding objectives for Active Component (AC) forces were 1 year deployed to 2 years at home station).⁵ His new policy required alerts for RC units to be at least 24 months prior to activation.⁶

Under the current provisions of 10 USC 12302, RC members may serve actively no more than 24-consecutive months.⁷ Under current Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) policy, RC members shall serve for a period of one year at any one time, excluding time for individual skill training required for deployment and post mobilization leave.⁸ RC members may be recalled for active duty for subsequent service at anytime.⁹ However, if their dwell-time goal is broken, RC members qualify for a monetary incentive and/or additional compensation for the subsequent service.¹⁰ The policy did not meet its goals of alleviating stress on the force and providing predictability for Soldiers.

Under this 12 month policy, Army Reserve Soldiers are deploying more frequently and spending more time away from their families and civilian jobs to train for mobilization.

The RC provides operational capabilities and strategic depth to meet the nation's defense requirements across the full spectrum of conflict.¹¹ While these roles are not new, the active component reliance upon the Army Reserve to support operational missions has changed. The RC operated as a force in reserve during the Cold War. Army Reserve members normally served 39 days a year, one weekend a month, and two weeks during the summer.¹² If a major war broke out, it was expected that the Reserves would be called upon to augment the active forces in an operational role, principally in combat support or combat service support, and for most of the force the mobilization lead-time would likely be months, not weeks or days.¹³

President George W. Bush, announcing the mobilization of the reserve components in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, said " I fully understand that a mobilization affects the lives of Americans, I mean after all, we're talking about somebody's mom or somebody's dad, somebody's employee, somebody's friend's or somebody's neighbor. But the world will see that the strength of this nation is found in the character and dedication and courage of everyday citizens."¹⁴

What Defines the Reserves?

The Army Reserve is a vital part of our national defense team and an important resource in communities across the nation. Our Citizen-Soldiers serving in the Global War on Terror depend on their families, friends, civilian employers, and community to help them balance their responsibilities and commitments.¹⁵ Citizen Soldiers serve part-time. Most have civilian jobs or attend school. Reservists juggle service requirements with those of a job or school. Unlike Soldiers on active duty, an Army Reserve Soldier's commitment is approximately one weekend a month currently referred to as Battle Assembly, and two weeks a year, referred to as Annual Training (AT). But, reservists

can be mobilized for employment or deployment to serve our country when the need arises.

Reservists bring to the military many civilian skills, training, and professional experiences that are not easily maintained in the active components.¹⁶ Reservists are often skill-rich citizen-warriors who can provide an enhanced capability to the military. They are especially useful in reconstruction efforts and policing activities.¹⁷ They also have unique advantages for supporting civilian authorities in homeland defense missions. Reservists work as first responders in the police, medical, and fire-fighting professions. Our country relies on a pre-trained reserve force. Reservists also have ties to the community that promote public support for military members.

The reserve components provide our military's most intimate and extensive links to the American people. The value of this linkage, which cannot be discounted, underscores the benefit of investing in prudently using this increasingly important portion of our military forces.¹⁸ The Army Reserve provides the total Army with 87 percent of its civil affairs capacity, more than two-thirds of its expeditionary sustainment commands, and nearly half of its military police commands and information operations groups.¹⁹

The Army, as an American Profession of Arms, has begun a new era of training and strategic planning to meet changes in the world.²⁰ A decade of repetitive deployments in the era of persistent conflict has left the Army and, especially its part-time members, in the words of General Casey, "stressed and stretched."²¹ Radical innovation is needed by Army leaders to meet the new demands of the Profession of Arms.²² The Army relies on the Reserve's abundance of expertise. These Army

Reservists are invaluable to the profession of arms, but we can lose these experts if we continue to “stretch” them.

Army Reserve Soldiers, when not mobilized, are less expensive than AC soldiers because they are part-time. Reservists spend less time in uniform and therefore are much less expensive over a career. Active duty Soldiers annually receive 360 days of basic pay, while Army Reserve Soldiers receive about 63 days of basic pay. Drilling reservists receive a pro-rated allowance for Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) and Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAH). Additionally, RC retirement is pro-rated to days served and annuity payments are delayed till age 60, unless sooner based on credits for deployed time.

The Army Reserve is a community based force filled with highly skilled members who are generally representative of the men and women in their larger communities from the same age group.²³ The diversity in their ranks and the complementary value of their military and civilian skills, as well as their grassroots connection with localities, add significant value to the nation.²⁴

Some of skills the Army Reserve Soldiers offer are obtained from their civilian training and not through their military schooling. Their military specialty training as well as training in the civilian sector offers unmatched knowledge in some areas in the military, such as law enforcement and medicine. These professions often have more practitioner experience in certain areas than their active duty counterparts.

Reserve Soldiers need more time to sharpen their existing skills and learn new skills necessary for their deployment missions. The previous policy of mobilizing RC Soldiers for 16–18 months allowed four months for unit post-mobilization training and 12

months of deployed time. Current policies now limit mobilization to a maximum of one year. At least two months of the former four month training will have to be conducted in the year prior to mobilization, resulting in broken time periods away from the family and employers. The new policy disrupts family time and availability for civilian jobs. Employers prefer a single absence rather than taking Soldiers from their jobs for pre-mobilization training, returning them to work for a short period, and then mobilizing them for a long period.

Reservists and their employers have become alarmed at the increased use of the Army Reserve over the years. The Uniformed Services and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) is a federal law intended to ensure that persons who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, Reserves, National Guard or other “uniformed services”²⁵ are (1) not disadvantaged in their civilian careers because of their service;²⁶ (2) promptly reemployed in their civilian jobs upon their return from duty;²⁷ and (3) not discriminated against in employment based on past, present, or future military service.²⁸ Policy makers have stated that the USERRA was not written with an operational reserve in mind.

Citizen Soldiers provide many benefits to their employer through their additional experience and skills gained during military service. Army Reserve Soldiers sometimes face conflicts between demands from their civilian job and their reserve obligations. There are times when their call to military duty takes precedence over their civilian workplace. In some cases Soldiers must choose between the two.

Strategic vs. Operational Reserve

Since the Korean War and up until the Persian Gulf War, RC members were rarely mobilized for overseas missions.²⁹ From 1961-1962, 148,034 reservists were briefly mobilized for the Berlin Crisis, but few were deployed.³⁰ Later in 1962, 14,200 reservists were mobilized for the Cuban Missile Crisis and 37,643 for the Vietnam War/U.S.S. Pueblo Crisis (1968-69).³¹ Thus for the entire duration of the Cold War, the RC was largely unused to conduct operations.³² It was the nation's insurance policy, classified as a "strategic reserve."³³ The strategic reserve served as an expandable force to support the Cold War Army.

The overall readiness of the strategic reserve was hindered by the lack of resources. The Army did not fully equip the Army Reserve and accepted the risk of not fully equipping them until the unit was preparing for deployment. Consequently, the Army Reserve was left to train on obsolete equipment.

The three phased strategic reserve mobilization policy consisted of alert, train, and deploy. This methodology was part of the Cold War mentality that planned for the Army Reserve to be called upon only in an emergency. Related assumptions were that a reservist would likely only deploy once in his or her career and that the active component deploys first, followed by the RCs. That allowed the strategic reserve time to be alerted, trained and then deployed. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) justifies the operational reserve with the following:

The traditional, visible distinction between war and peace is less clear at the start of the 21st century. In a long war, the United States expects to face large and small contingencies at unpredictable intervals. To fight long war and conduct other future contingency operations, joint force commanders need to have more immediate access to the Total Force. In particular, the Reserve Component must be operationalized so that select reservists and units are more accessible and more readily deployable than today. During the Cold War, the Reserve Component was used,

appropriately, as a “strategic reserve,” to provide support to Active Component forces during major combat operations. In today’s global context, this concept is less relevant.³⁴

The QDR continues by defining the role of the operational reserve and specifying its relationship with the AC:

The operational reserve concept is part of the Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1200.17. The directive describes the role of the RCs as providing operational capabilities and strategic depth to meet all requirements across the full spectrum of conflict. The Active Components (ACs) and RCs are integrated as a total force based on the attributes of the particular component and individual competencies.³⁵

The Independent Panel Review of Reserve Component Employment in an Era of Persistent Conflict defined the “RC as part of the operational force...an operational reserve component (RC) consists of units, identified, focused, resourced and prepared for specific missions at home or abroad.” They go on to specify the capability of that force as:

RC units provide tailorable capabilities that are needed to meet diverse operational demands. RC units are accounted for in the Deployed Expeditionary Force (DEF) and Contingency Expeditionary Force (CEF) Pools and will be prepared to deploy within the schedule outlined in the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process.³⁶

The Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) is the:

...structured progression of increased unit readiness over time, resulting in recurring periods of availability of trained, ready, and cohesive active, National Guard, and U.S. Army reserve units prepared for operational deployment in support of combatant commanders (CCDR), civil authority , and contingency force requirements.³⁷

The ARFORGEN model was designed to provide predictability and training time for deployments. The goal of predictability was intended to improve the overall quality of life for the all-volunteer force. However, the ARFORGEN model does not yet provide predictability for Army Reserve units since it has not been implemented as designed.

Also, combatant command requirements have resulted in certain units being alerted and mobilized out of cycle. As demands for Afghanistan decrease and the Army Reserve resets, the ARFORGEN model may provide more predictability for the force.

Impacts of an Operational Reserve

The operational reserve requires a more significant investment of training and resources, and places greater demands on its personnel as compared to the strategic reserve.³⁸ Dr. David Chu, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness testified before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves about how long and how often RC members may be utilized:

Ultimately, the cross-cutting question in my judgment is really a question about how frequently should reserve personnel be asked to serve. They are reserve personnel. They are not active duty. It's a different status, different set of benefits, different set of rules, different expectations. They do have a civilian career, we need to respect that. They do have a family that does not expect them to be at home as much as a family of an active duty service member would expect, because then they would be an active duty service member. They've often had that choice and they've made that choice. I think we have to honor that choice.³⁹

Dr. Chu's statement emphasizes the importance that Soldiers, families, and employees understand that the reservist still has a voice in their career. The constant utilization of RCs has caused tremendous stress on the force and Reservists do not always have adequate resources available to them. The Army Reserve as an operational force requires more time for pre-mobilization training, along with one year absence from their civilian employment.

Active component soldiers have access to the Army's health facilities, while reserve component personnel may not be eligible or live far from active duty or Veterans Administration (VA) facilities. War is always difficult for service members and their families. Chronic war, with frequent deployments and repeated exposure to

traumatic events, only amplifies the problems experienced by military personnel. As problems increase, so does the frequency of use by service members of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Even legitimate pharmaceuticals can lead to abuse and dependence. Active combat operations for the past 10 years are particularly difficult for Reservists who recall the RC's former role as a strategic reserve.

An increasing number of returning Soldiers are showing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Included in this population are many demobilized Army Reserve and National Guard members who have returned to their communities and civilian lives. PTSD is the medical condition that develops when stress occurs after an associated event that adversely impacts normal activities of one's daily life⁴⁰ Such traumatic events can have a serious impact on a Soldier's emotional state. PTSD decreases marital satisfaction, exacerbates depression, and may be related to other behavioral health problems and high risk behavior.⁴¹ Cases of PTSD are increasing among RC Soldiers that never deployed or deployed one time. The two categories added together account for a high percentage of suicides committed by RC soldiers.

While active-duty Army suicides are trending downward, reserve-component suicides appear to be on the rise -- a fact that worries leaders as the Army observes Suicide Prevention Month.⁴² "We're seeing a really disturbing increase in reserve-component suicides," said Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army at a Pentagon Army leader's forum. "I don't totally understand it, but we're working hard to try and get at it."⁴³

The suicide rate continues to increase for RC Soldiers returning to civilian life.⁴⁴ In a reversal from previous years, Army Guardsmen and Reservists committed suicide

more frequently in 2010 than their active duty counterparts; total Army manpower is roughly divided in half between the active and reserve components.⁴⁵ When reservists return from deployment, they are rushed through the demobilization process because they are eager to get back to their families. Most of them do not realize they have problems until after they return to work or school. Adjusting to family life and civilian employment is often difficult for the Army Reservist. They are no longer on active duty, making it harder to monitor suicidal tendencies.

Drug and alcohol abuse is a major health problem in the Army Reserve. The Millennium Cohort Study found that Army National Guard and Reserve Soldiers who deployed were significantly more like to abuse alcohol than their non-deployed peers.⁴⁶ Guard and Reserve personnel are at increased risk for heavy or binge drinking, with all its associated problems, and more likely to require mental health treatment upon their redeployment than their active duty counterparts. Guard and Reserve families, with less access to military support systems than other military families, often experience increased problems as well. Troop Program Unit (TPU) Soldiers are not authorized nor funded to receive treatment in the Army Substance Abuse Program.

Reservists face other stressors, such as remaining competitive with their peers in civilian jobs after long deployments. In a recent article published in Columbia, SC, a South Carolina reservist is suing his employer. The Soldier claims the company impeded his career because he took time off for military training.⁴⁷ Army Reserve Staff Sgt. Alan King has filed his lawsuit against Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Columbia, saying the company placed him on probation and transferred him to a low-volume store where he is likely to make less money.⁴⁸ Retired Army captain and former

military lawyer Sam Wright says reservists and National Guard members are fighting to keep their jobs after being deployed as many as three or four times during wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁹

As Reservists return from deployment and transition from active duty to their civilian lives, some struggle to cope with interrupted relationships. Returning Soldiers are faced with the task of reestablishing relationships with family and readjusting to civilian social life after living in a combat zone. During deployments, it is likely that Soldiers' family members, friends, and fellow workers have changed (at least to some extent), as have the soldiers, and it will take time to rekindle relationships and reestablish family and social routines.

Shaping the Force

In February 2010 an Army Times article contends that the Army Reserve has too many young, new Soldiers and not enough sergeants and staff sergeants; too many lieutenants and colonels, but not enough captains and majors.⁵⁰ The Army Reserve's overall end strength totals approximately 207,000 Soldiers.⁵¹ But these numbers do not represent the right mix of Soldiers in its ranks. The Army Reserve is conducting REFRAD boards to help alleviate some of the problems in the over strength ranks, but this does not address shortages in other ranks.

It is important to structure the Army Reserve to meet the demands of national security. Successfully manning the force requires that the Army Reserve maintain a sufficient balance of critical skills among military specialties. Currently, RC critical military specialties such as intelligence and logistics are not optimized for today's rapid deployability requirements. The Army Reserve is encouraging

Soldiers in over strength military specialties to reclass into the under strength critical military specialties. The Army Reserve is also working with recruiters to restructure reserve forces in order to mitigate stress on the force.

The Army Posture Statements from 2008, 2009, and 2010 all indicate that the Army is out of balance. The Independent Panel Review of Reserve Component Employment in an Era of Persistent Conflict defines balance as the “equipoise between contrasting, opposing, or interacting elements.”⁵² Within the RC, the contrasting and interacting elements include the time needed for RC Soldiers to pursue civilian professions and jobs while preparing for active duty and the time RC Soldiers require for professional military education and growth.⁵³

The DOD policy and the ARFORGEN model have a goal for reservists to be mobilized for 1 year, followed by 5 years without mobilization. This goal has been difficult to achieve since 2007 because operational demands for Army Reserve forces have remained high. The Independent Panel Review of Reserve Component in an Era of Persistent Conflict is concerned about the stress on the force and recommends that it is time for a 9-month boots on the ground (BOG) for both AC and RC units, to help create 1:3 and 1:5 “spin cycles.”⁵⁴

The panel feels that the force is stressed and spinning at 1:2 (AC) and 1:4 (RC) does not provide adequate dwell time.⁵⁵ Additionally, the panel stated that high rates of suicides and other stress-related metrics are indicators of failure to provide adequate dwell time.⁵⁶ Demand for reserve forces is now on the decline and the goal for a 1:5 dwell time may be achievable by 2014 when demand for forces may require only a portion of the model’s “ready force.”

It is imperative that the Army leadership adopt policies that support the 1:5 BOG goal for Reserve Soldiers. Operating at the high tempo of 1:4 will eventually affect the overall readiness and retention of the Army Reserve. Enforcing the 1:5 BOG is critical in sustaining the force by providing adequate dwell time for the reservist, maintaining their civilian career, and providing predictability for Soldiers, families, and employers.

After demobilization Army Reserve Soldiers and their families often experience the adjustment issues that were discussed earlier. A 90 day blackout period is optional for returning Reservists during post-mobilization. While well intended to reduce requirements on the Army Reserve Soldier, the resulting loss of visibility of the Soldier's health status is not optimal. Representative Rush D. Holt, a New Jersey Democrat, says that members of the reserve components do not receive a thorough screening for mental health issues when they return from deployments.⁵⁷ Holt wrote a bill requiring phone contacts with reservists that suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder every 90 days after they come home from war.⁵⁸

The bill was taken out of the defense authorization bills for fiscal years 2010 and 2011.⁵⁹ Recommend DOD work with Congress to have the bill included in the fiscal year 2012 defense authorization bills and that it be retained in the final version. The Army Reserve needs a system that monitors the health status of all demobilized reservists, especially those not attending battle assemblies in their 90 day post-mobilization period. During the post-mobilization period, Soldiers are adjusting to their families and civilian jobs. Sometimes these adjustments are challenging for the Soldier. This bill will provide a system that ensures Soldiers are monitored and, when necessary, treated for their disorders.

The ARFORGEN model must address recruiting, manning, organizing, equipping, training, mobilizing, and sustaining processes if it is to succeed at meeting combatant commander requirements at predetermined aim points within the cycle to achieve defined levels of readiness.⁶⁰ The Independent Panel Review of Reserve Component Employment in an Era of Persistent Conflict recommended refining ARFORGEN to generate bands of units that are identified, resourced, and trained at levels corresponding to their Deployed Expeditionary Force (DEF), Contingency Expeditionary Force (CEF), or homeland security/homeland defense missions.⁶¹

Army leadership should reevaluate the strategy of the model and implement the panel's recommendation. ARFORGEN represents the Army's best effort to provide predictability for Soldiers, their families, and employers. This recommendation will ensure that the RCs are properly manned, equipped, and trained for predicted operational demands. ARFORGEN's effectiveness relies on our ability to predict demand and match resources; the Army needs to become better at rapidly adapting to changes indicated as necessary by the best predictions available. Rapid adaptability is essential to ensure that the RC force has time to adjust its structure to provide capabilities needed to support our nation.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a DOD organization established in 1972 to promote cooperation and understanding between Reserve component members and their civilian employers and to assist in the resolution of conflicts arising from an employee's military commitment.⁶² ESGR was designated the lead DOD organization for this mission under DoD Directive 1250.1.⁶³ LTG Stultz believes that employers of reservists are asking for:

... "some credit for what they are doing...They're saying it would be nice to have some tax incentive, it would be nice to get some compensation, because when I give you that employee to be a Soldier, I have to cover for them. I have to get someone to take his place to do the work he's doing...So we're working on that with Congress and others to say, how can we help share the burden that employers are feeling?"⁶⁴

Recommend that Army Reserve leaders continue to work with Congress to get a bill passed that provides employers a tax incentive for employing RC Soldiers. Many employers continue to provide benefits and pay to Reservists while they are mobilized. These employers understand the reservist's role in the operational force and that their employees can be absent once every five years due to their military obligations. The tax incentive will provide compensation to the employers for their dedication to the reservists, their businesses' loss of skills the reservist provides to the company, and the cost of temporarily replacing an employee.

USERRA establishes five years as the cumulative length of time that an individual may be absent from work for military duty and retain reemployment rights (the previous law provided four years of active duty, plus an additional year if it was for the convenience of the Government).⁶⁵ There are important exceptions to the five-year limit, including initial enlistments lasting more than five years, periodic National Guard and Reserve training duty, and involuntary active duty extensions and recalls, especially during a time of national emergency. USERRA clearly establishes that reemployment protection does not depend on the timing, frequency, duration, or nature of an individual's service as long as the basic eligibility criteria are met.

USERRA was written in 1994. The Reserve Officers Association (ROA) of the United States recommended improvements to the USERRA. One proposed improvement is to expand USERRA's definition of "service in the uniformed services" to

include an employee's absence from work for purposes of medical treatment (from Department of Defense or Department of Veterans Affairs facilities) for a wound, injury, or illness incurred or aggravated during a period of service in the uniformed services .⁶⁶

In addition to expanding the definition of "service in the uniformed services" to include an employee's need to be absent from work for purposes of medical treatment, Congress also should include absences due to pre-mobilization training. Reservists are required to be absent from their civilian jobs for training required for upcoming deployments and should not be penalized. All employers are not punishing their reservists, but the law needs expanding to protect the reservists' rights from those employers who do.

Conclusion

The Army Reserve regards itself as a community-based, federal operational force of skill-rich Warrior-Citizens who provide essential capabilities for full spectrum operations.⁶⁷ The basis of this definition is the continuous mobilization of a significant portion of today's Army Reserve forces.⁶⁸ The Army Reserve has supported nine major operations and several lesser contingencies since 1990.⁶⁹ This legacy of service set the conditions necessary to embrace the operational future of the Army Reserve.⁷⁰

The Army Reserve remains committed to serving as part of the Operational Force. This cultural change for our Soldiers and our nation initially caused unpredictability for families and employees. The Army Reserve contains some of the best qualified people the United States has to offer, and they joined (or rejoined) the reserves with the expectation that they were to become members of an operational, not a "weekend warrior," force.⁷¹

The cost of serving in the Army Reserve will remain high. These costs include multiple deployments, time away from families, and absence from civilian jobs. The active component cannot support the long war without the help of the RCs. The Army Reserve cannot return to being a strategic reserve as long as the long war, or wars like it, continues. The Army Reserve brings to the war-fight critical skills that are needed by the active component. There will be challenges with the Army Reserve being part of the operational force, but we must adopt policies to support the concept.

It is important that the DOD effectively communicate the role of the Army Reserve. The nation must understand that the Army Reserve will remain part of the operational force and that they will be called upon to serve more frequently. The Army Reserve has existed for over 100 years and many changes have occurred during that time. Changes will continue to occur. And those changes may eventually include less frequent use of the Army Reserve and deletion of the concept “operational reserve” from our vocabulary. But for the near future, the concept is with us and its impact on reserve soldiers must be addressed; one thing that remains consistent is that the Army Reserve will be there when the nation calls.

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